

The division of Europe

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Held from 28 November to 2 December 1943, the Teheran Conference was the first summit meeting between Winston Churchill, Joseph Stalin and Franklin D. Roosevelt. It set out the major guidelines for post-war international politics. The leaders discussed the Normandy invasion, then fixed for 1 May 1944, the fate of Germany and its possible dismemberment and how the world should be organised after the conflict. They decided to entrust the study of the German question to a European Consultative Commission.

At the Conference held in Yalta in the Crimea from 2 to 11 February 1945, those same leaders determined the fate of Europe now freed from Nazism. They first of all agreed on the arrangements for the occupation of Germany. Although France did not take part in the Conference, it was allocated an occupation zone in Germany, to be carved out in part from the British and American zones. They also adopted the principle of the dismemberment of German territory. As for Poland, they came to an agreement on new frontiers. Poland would extend more westwards, losing territory in the east, to be taken over by the Soviet Union, whilst gaining some eastern German provinces. That would involve the resettlement of several million Germans. The three heads of government also signed a 'Declaration on the policy to be followed in the liberated regions', a text which envisaged free elections being held and democratic governments taking office. Yalta seemed to be the final attempt to reorganise the world on a basis of cooperation and agreement.

The world was not yet divided into two hemispheres of influence, but the Western Powers were obliged to accept Stalin's role in the territories liberated by Soviet tanks. Central and Eastern Europe were henceforth under the exclusive control of the Red Army. It seemed that Stalin took the view that each power would finish up by imposing its own political system wherever it exercised military control.